

Saudi Arabia

Facts and Statistics

Location: The Middle East, bordering Iraq 814 km, Jordan 744 km, Kuwait 222 km, Oman 676 km, Qatar 60 km, UAE 457 km, Yemen 1,458 km

Capital: Riyadh

Climate: harsh, dry desert with great temperature extremes

Population: 25,795,938 including 5,576,076 non-nationals (July 2004 est.)

Ethnic Make-up: Arab 90%, Afro-Asian 10%

Religions: Muslim 100%

Government: monarchy

Language in Saudi Arabia

Arabic is the official language of Saudi Arabia, but English is widely spoken. It is used in business and is a compulsory second language in schools. Among the non-Saudi population, many people speak Urdu, the official language of Pakistan, and other Asian languages such as Farsi and Turkish.

Arabic is spoken by almost 200 million people in more than 22 countries. It is the language of the Qur'an, the Holy Book of Islam, and of Arab poetry and literature. While spoken Arabic varies from country to country, classical Arabic has remained unchanged for centuries. In Saudi, there are differences between the dialects spoken in urban areas and those spoken in rural areas.

Saudi Society & Culture

Islam

Islam is practiced by all Saudis and governs their personal, political, economic and legal lives. Islam was born in Saudi Arabia and thus is visited by millions of Muslims every year. The Prophet Muhammad is seen as the last of God's emissaries (following in the footsteps of Jesus, Moses, Abraham, etc) to bring revelation to mankind. He was distinguished with bringing a message for the whole of mankind, rather than just to a certain peoples. As Moses brought the Torah and Jesus the Bible, Muhammad brought the last book, the Quran. The Quran and the actions of the Prophet (the Sunnah) are used as the basis for all guidance in the religion.

Among certain obligations for Muslims are to pray five times a day - at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening. The exact time is listed in the local newspaper each day. Friday is the Muslim holy day. Everything is closed. Many companies also close on Thursday, making the weekend Thursday and Friday.

During the holy month of Ramadan all Muslims must fast from dawn to dusk and are only permitted to work six hours per day. Fasting includes no eating, drinking, cigarette smoking, or gum chewing. Expatriates are not required to fast; however, they must not eat, drink, smoke, or chew gum in public.

Each night at sunset, families and friends gather together to celebrate the breaking of the fast (iftar). The festivities often continue well into the night. In general, things happen more slowly during Ramadan. Many businesses operate on a reduced schedule. Shops may be open and closed at unusual times.

Family Values

- . The family and tribe are the basis of the social structure.
- . As is seen in their naming conventions, Saudis are cognizant of their heritage, their clan, and their extended family, as well as their nuclear family.
- . Saudis take their responsibilities to their family quite seriously.
- . Families tend to be large and the extended family is quite close.
- . The individual derives a social network and assistance in times of need from the family.
- . Nepotism is considered a good thing, since it implies that employing people one knows and trusts is of primary importance.